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# Connections



# April

La Crosse County  
Human Services  
Dept.

Volume 8, Issue 4

## April is Child Abuse Prevention Month!

Coulee Region Child Abuse Prevention Task Force announces the kick-off of their 2006 Child Abuse Prevention Month campaign "Great Kids Start with You." La Crosse Mayor Mark Johnsrud, Onalaska Mayor Jim Bialecki, West Salem Village President Dennis Manti, Holmen Village President John Chapman and La Crosse Mayor Mike Poellinger proclaimed April as Child Abuse Prevention month at each area's City Hall on April 3rd.

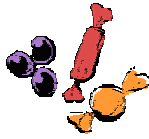
The Coulee Region Child Abuse Prevention Task force was formed in 1998. This year the task force consists of 21 local agencies. The Task Force was created with the purpose of creating a public awareness campaign each April that will reach as many people as possible with the message "Great Kids Start With You!" This year the task force held a T-shirt contest in February and members chose the T-shirt design by Katie Mattson, a student from St. Patrick's School in Onalaska. Katie won a \$100 savings bond, and her teacher won a \$100 gift certificate for participating.

The Mayoral Proclamation designating April as Child Abuse Prevention Month is a way for communities to think about promoting and educating their families and community members about child abuse prevention. The symbol for prevention is the blue ribbon, a reminder that each day we all have the chance to make a difference in the life of a child. Blue ribbons and pins are available at many locations throughout the Coulee Region, including displays at the mall, libraries, hospitals, local agencies, and grocery stores.

The Coulee Region Child Abuse Prevention Task Force plans to distribute over 25,000 blue ribbons and pins. The public will also note blue ribbons and informational posters on the light poles in downtown La Crosse during April. "Our community has really embraced this issue," said Deb Cowan, Assistant Director of Family Resources. "We believe that our efforts encourage healthy parenting, educate people about child abuse, and connect parents to community resources."

# Mark Your Calendar!

## Parade Dates for 2006



### Onalaska Sunfish Days

Saturday, May 27 12:00 pm

### West Salem June Dairy Days

Saturday, June 3 12:00 pm

### Holmen Kornfest

Saturday, August 19 11:00 am

### La Crosse Torchlight

Thursday, October 5 7:00 pm



*If anyone is interested in being in any of the parades  
please call Rhonda Rude at 789-4834.*

*The more people the more fun so please think about it and invite a friend along!*

# Congratulations Bev Trussoni!



As some of you may already know Bev has accepted a new position within La Crosse County Human Services. Bev recently began her new career as a Chemical Dependency Social Worker in Clinical Services. While working as a Social Service Specialist Bev played an intricate role in bringing the HALO's project to realization for our foster children. Bev also worked closely with our respite homes, maintained the emergency rotation schedule, respite and training hours and the Connections Newsletter all while offering support to the Alternate Care social workers. We wish Bev success in her new role with the Department.





## Welcome New Foster Families

Submitted by Will Herber

**Please welcome Jean Van Riper** to the foster care community. Jean lives in Mindoro, Wisconsin and is already a certified adult foster care provider. She comes to the child foster care community to be licensed as a Crisis Respite Provider as part of La Crosse County's Mental Health Crisis Program. Jean is being trained to provide Crisis Stabilization to other foster homes as well as other families in the community. Jean will be able to care for persons of all ages that need assistance through the Crisis Program. If you should meet her at one of the yearly foster care events or at the up and coming trainings, please welcome her to our child foster care community.



### *What Do You Mean By .....*

**Loss Issues:** When children lose loved ones through separation, divorce or death, some feel immediate grief but others may deny their loss. Long-term denial or avoidance of grief can result in severe problems.

Signs that indicate professional help might be needed include extended depression, loss of interest in daily activities, inability to sleep, loss of appetite, a drop in school performance, hyperactivity, aggression and inability to concentrate.

**Residential Treatment:** A structured out-of-home placement for children with behavioral problems. A residential treatment facility provides 24-hour care with counseling and therapy. Children are usually placed in residential treatment only after their families have unsuccessfully tried other ways to help them. A child may need residential treatment for his or her own safety, or for the safety of others.

*Excerpted from Adopt! January 2005. Published by Adoption Resources of Wisconsin.*

# Sexual Behaviors in Young Children: Distinguishing Between Curiosity and Abuse

Young children learn by observing and doing. They learn about sex through discovering that their bodies respond pleasantly to their own touch and the appropriate touches of others, through talking about sex with adults and children, and by imitating observed adult behavior in games with other children.

Today's young children live in a world that emphasizes sex and sexuality. They are naturally curious about everything, so societal preoccupation with sex increases children's curiosity and openness in expressing what they observe around them. Research finds that young children more often exhibit sexual behaviors when they have witnessed family nudity, observed sexual intimacies of parents or other adults in the home, and been exposed to adult sexual behavior on t.v. and movies. Research also tells us that many young non-abused children typically engage in sexual behaviors that take the form of sex play, self-stimulation, or sex talk. These behaviors decrease with age, after peaking between ages 3 to 6. Early sexual behaviors are exploratory and pleasurable. Children are curious about sexuality but not the exclusion of other areas of life or play.

How can adults determine what behaviors are part of a child's natural curiosity and development and what behaviors indicate that the child may have been sexually abused? And how are adults to respond to young children's public expressions of their sexuality without causing them to feel shamed?

## Types of Sexual Behaviors

**Self-stimulation.** Many experts consider self-stimulation a common behavior for children ages 3-6 and a normal part of growing up. For most children, however, self-stimulation will be sporadic. If the child persists in public displays past kindergarten age, engages in the behavior excessively, or is so preoccupied with this activity that it interferes with other interests or relationships, the child may need professional intervention.

**Sex play.** Play is one way children learn about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. For the young child, sex play is a way of establishing a sexual identity and learning about sex roles. Curiosity about others' body parts is quite common among children at the age of three. These behaviors are typically not problematic but need to be monitored for signs that one child is exploiting another or that the play is being carried to extremes, persists repeatedly over time, or is more abusive, manipulative, or coercive in nature. Coercion is more likely to occur where there is an age or gender difference between the play partners.

**Sex talk and fantasy.** As children reach school age, their heightened interest in sex may lead to asking about genital differences, peeping, using sexual words or bathroom talk, and having sexual dreams. This interest occurs between 3 to 6, then goes underground until adolescence, even though modesty and shyness can also exist. Adolescent behaviors include crushes on peers and older persons, dressing provocatively, and interest in sexual matters.

## Responding to Sexual Behaviors

In response to children's public expressions of their sexuality, Lively and Lively, in their book *Sexual development of young children*, offer these tips:

### **Self-stimulation**

- Ignore occasional self-stimulating behavior in the young child.
- Help the child find other interests and satisfactions; perhaps the child is bored.
- Increase the amount of time spent with and display more affection towards the child.
- Help the child find other ways to release tensions.
- Teach a child who is approaching school age that this behavior is private.

*(continued on next page)*

### ***Sex-play and anatomical investigations***

- With very young children, ignore occasional, non-coercive sex play. Adult admonitions will make the play seem more attractive at a later, less supervised time.
- Monitor group play more closely if games of a sexual nature are occurring, and if possible, eliminate private enclosures that would be natural sites for "games" to occur away from adult supervision.
- For older children, or when play persists, explain to them about the private nature of their sexual organs. Provide a wide range of social and physical activities to keep children involved in other interests.

### ***Sex-talk and fantasy***

- Ignore the initial use of sex talk in young children, since it is often sporadic and has no meaning to the child unless an adult displays shock or anger.
- Help the child understand that the word is inappropriate, best said in private (if at all), what it means, and could cause them embarrassment.
- Adolescents are testing limits and developing identities. Provide support to them whenever possible and avoid overreacting to their behaviors.

### **Sexuality and Abuse**

If a child's heightened sexual focus includes anger, secrecy, anxiety, compulsivity, fear, coercion, or force, that child may need professional intervention. In general, when trying to distinguish between normal behaviors and those resulting from abuse, be on the look-out for patterns of sexual behavior that persist over time, play that is more serious and controlling rather than fun and mutual, instances where children know too much for their age and begin to engage in sex play that is age-inappropriate, or a sudden onset of behavior that is atypical for that child. For example, a child who had not previously done so might begin masturbating quite frequently and openly.

Children who have been sexually abused may experience depression, feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, compulsivity, anger, acting out, or withdrawal. They may regress to outgrown behaviors, display temper tantrums, use loud talking and foul language, use coercion in sex play, and exhibit hyperactivity. They also display other problems such as somatic difficulties, enuresis and encopresis, suicide attempts, eating and sleeping disorders, difficulties with peers, self-mutilation, negative attitudes about their body, running away, firesetting, and sexual acting out. Browne and Finkelhor, in their article *Impact of child sexual abuse: A review of the research*, conclude that "inappropriate sexualized, aggressive play is one of the most predictable consequence of childhood sexual abuse."

### **Understanding Sexuality**

If children are to develop healthy sexuality, they must not be traumatized for their normal curiosity about sex. "Most problems of a sexual nature with regard to the young child, however, are problems largely in the eyes of the parents, since the child may be involved in behavior that is part of the normal sequence in the process of developing a sexuality." However, adults need to become familiar with child development and the range of behaviors typical of different ages in order to distinguish normal curiosity from abuse indicators.

SOURCE: *Protection Connection* newsletter (Volume V, Issue 1); 1998; published by the Protective Services Training Institute of Texas; available online at <http://www.utexas.edu/research/cswr/psti/index.php?lm=newsletter&m=protconn>

## Moments in Wisconsin in 2003

Every **month** a child died from abuse or neglect.

Every **2 hours** a child was sexually abused.

Every **54 minutes** a child was physically abused.

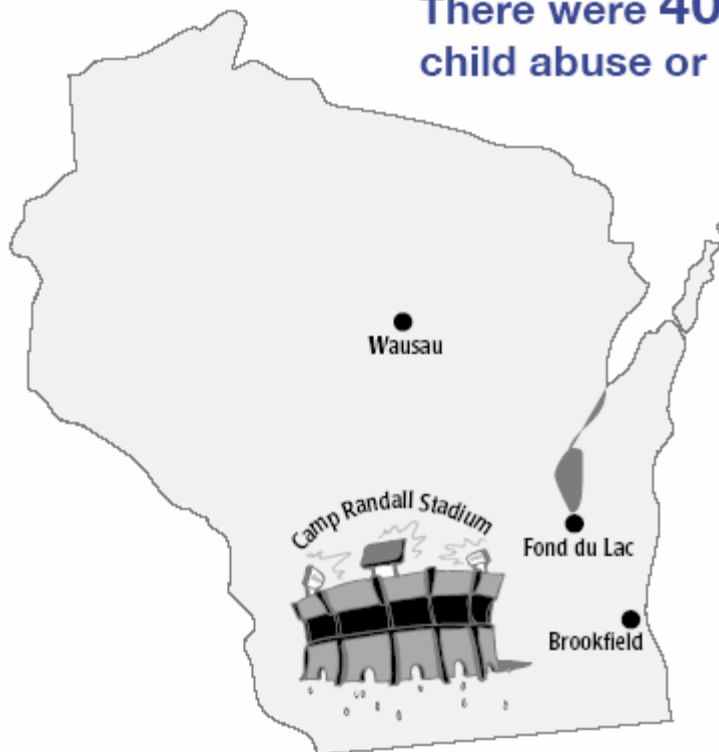


Every **13 minutes** a child was reported abused or neglected.

Every **34 minutes** a child under the age of 5 was abused or neglected.

Every **42 minutes** a child was neglected.

## There were **40,473 reports\*** of suspected child abuse or neglect in 2003 in Wisconsin



That's about the same as the population of Brookfield, Wausau, or Fond du Lac and would fill more than half of the seats in Camp Randall Stadium.

- In less than 20% of the reported cases, investigators found evidence that a child had been abused or neglected. That's 7,994 children, or an average of 22 children per day in Wisconsin.
- More than 1/3 (38%) of the substantiated abuse and neglect cases are for children 5 years of age and younger.
- Almost 3/4 (73.48%) of the substantiated cases for children are abused or neglected by their own parent, caretaker, relative, or other household member.

*Most experts agree child abuse and neglect are greatly under reported.*

\* Bureau of Programs and Policies, Division of Children and Family Services, 2003 Annual Report to the Governor and Legislature on Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect.





## 'Twas The Day Before Easter

Author Unknown

'Twas the day before Easter and all through the woods,  
The bunnies were busy packing their goods.  
The eggs were all colored so pretty and bright,  
All things were "go" for the big special night.

The baskets were waiting, all decorated with care,  
In hopes that the Bunny soon would be there.  
My little brother Sam was asleep in his bed,  
While visions of Easter eggs rolled 'round his head.

And I in my pajamas with the cat on my lap,  
I had just settled down for a quick little nap.  
When outside the window I heard a great noise,  
I sprang from my chair and jumped over some toys.

As quick as a flash to the window I flew,  
I pulled up the shade and, OH, what a view.  
The moon on the meadow cast a bright golden glow  
And the wind blew the flowers to and then fro.

Then all of a sudden from out of nowhere,  
Came some lively bunnies, hopping here, hopping there!  
Leading the group with ears long and funny  
Was a plump, all-white rabbit... That's right, the EASTER BUNNY!

The bunnies hopped past, one, two, three, four,  
The rabbit called out and then there were more.  
"Come Peter! Come Flopsy! Come Benny! Come Joe!  
Now hop along! Hop along! Hop along! GO!"

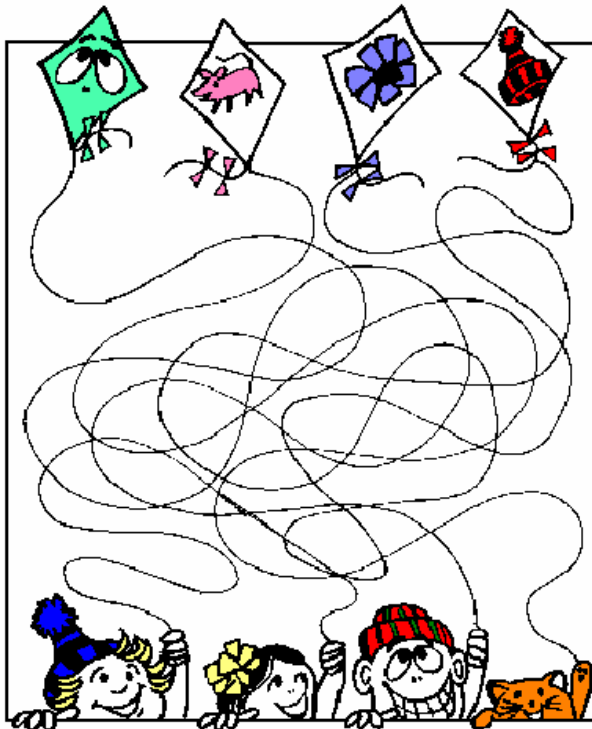
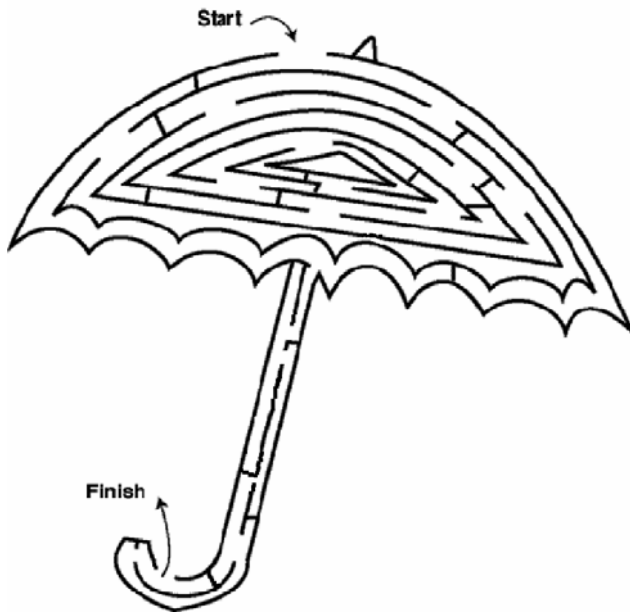
So up on each doorstep the bunnies did hop,  
With baskets of eggs. (Let's hope they don't drop!)  
Just at that moment, on the porch down below,  
Came the stomping of feet- 'Twas the rabbit I know!

As I stepped from my window I heard a loud sound.  
Through the door came the rabbit with a leap and a bound.  
He was furry and soft from his head to his feet.  
To see him so close was really quite neat.

He was surrounded by eggs that had been carefully dyed.  
Easter eggs galore he soon would hide.  
His eyes were all twinkles, His nose was so pink,  
And I can't be too sure but I think he did wink.

He had a kind face and a big fluffy tail  
That bobbed up and down like a boat with a sail.  
A twitch of his nose and a flick of his ear  
Was his way of saying "You've nothing to fear."

He uttered no sound as he hopped all about,  
Hiding the eggs and leaving no doubt.  
That the Easter bunny had come like he does every year...  
Bringing baskets of happiness to children so dear.



Can you figure out which kite belongs to who?

# fostering perspectives

Sponsored by the NC Division of Social Services and the NC Family and Children's Resource Program

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## Planting Forever Seeds

by Caryl Harvey



They left her mid-afternoon, dressed in too-large sweats, holding her worn bag in a death grip.

"I'm Lizabeth."

"Hi, Lizabeth, can I take your bag for you?"

I reached for it; she drew back.

Of course, I couldn't take it. It was hers. Inside, a crayon drawing of her mother and another stained, torn sweat suit were her treasures.

I wanted to gather her in my arms, to hug her, to make everything all right. Instead, I asked her if she'd like to see her room.

"Can I watch TV?" She eyed my seven-year-old grandson, sprawled on his stomach in front of the set. At my nod, she plopped down beside him and cupped her chin in her hands. She was eight, and alone, and the TV seemed the friendliest place to be.

Eventually, she left us, but not before she learned all the words to several bedtime stories, and how to make suds on the frilly bath "poof" in the tub. Not until she mastered writing her ABC's on primary "clothesline" paper, biting her tongue with the effort. Not before she found out adults can touch without hurting. She left us, waving frantically from the back window of the car that spirited her away. She cried, and so did we.

Foster children aren't forever. Foster parents are. That's why I love being a foster parent. We plant a seed in a child that grows with her, a seed of self-respect and trust. We don't always get to water it. Sometimes there's only time to drop it into the fertile soil of a young life. We seldom get to see it mature. But we plant our seed nevertheless, in the knowledge that it will make a difference as it grows. A forever difference.

*Caryl Harvey is a foster parent in Colorado. This essay was one of the winners of the Colorado State Foster Parent Association's 2003 essay contest on the subject "Why I Love Being a Foster Parent." To read other contest winners, visit the Casey Family Programs National Center for Resource Family Support at [http://www.casey.org/cnc/support\\_retention/](http://www.casey.org/cnc/support_retention/). Reprinted with permission from [www.casey.org/cnc/support\\_retention/caryl\\_harvey.htm](http://www.casey.org/cnc/support_retention/caryl_harvey.htm).*